

Kenneth Warlick, Legislative Analyst, Age 61.

What have you accomplished physically after 8 months of participation in a Kentucky sponsored health challenge program.

I have lost 50 pounds, reduced my waist size by 6 inches, my collar size by 2 inches, and my body fat from 27% to 18%. My blood pressure, cholesterol, body mass index (BMI), and blood glucose measures are now in the normal range. I have added lean muscle mass which has enhanced my body's ability to burn fat. I also have greater stamina, higher energy levels consistently throughout the day, and I am more alert and productive. My posture has improved, my clothes fit better, I can button my shirt collar, and it is easier to buy pants when one's waist and abdomen have approximately the same measurement.

What were your health concerns prior to beginning the health challenge?

In 2008, both I and my doctor became concerned about patterns in both my health and my appearance. My doctor focused on my blood pressure and rising cholesterol and he argued that I would likely be diagnosed as diabetic if I could not turn the symptoms around. I was concerned about my lack of stamina, energy swings throughout the day, and my increasing waist line and collar size. I doubted my ability to find more time in the day to exercise. I tried to convince myself that I was dieting because I periodically ate vegetables and a few foods rich in Omega 3 acids. However I was always hungry and always tired. I also found myself out of breath with only minimal exertion.

How did you get involved in a Kentucky sponsored health challenge program?

I attended a health fair at work to have my blood pressure, BMI, cholesterol, and weight checked. After reading a brochure from a representative for the Virgin Health Miles program, I signed up, received my pedometer, and started walking.

How difficult was it to get started?

The program goal is to walk a minimum of 7000 steps (approximately 3 miles) on five days out of seven. That's only 2500 steps more than the number of steps the average person takes during their normal routine. Initially I tried walking all 7000 steps in a continuous session after work. It took approximately an hour and ten minutes. At that time, I experienced some soreness or burning sensation during the first 3,000 steps but once I got past that threshold the soreness subsided.

Within a week I found that I had the stamina to increase my steps to a level between 12,000-15,000 steps split over two sessions morning and evening. I also found that my pace had increased and so continuous sessions took less time than before.

How have you incorporated exercise into your work and home life?

I gradually altered how I manage routine tasks in order to increase the number of steps taken per day. I now intentionally pick a healthy smart choice over a choice that simply offers the greatest convenience. For example, rather than driving to a store near my home, I walk. Since I now have to carry what I buy, I also get the incidental benefit of a light upper body workout from carrying my purchases. Walking has also motivated me to plan my shopping lists more carefully, buying only what I need. I've saved money as a result. If I do have to drive my car to run an errand, I park at a distance from the store and return the shopping cart to the store rather than leaving it in the parking lot.

How have you incorporated your health commitment into vacation and leisure time?

A two week vacation in a large coastal city proved both a challenge and an opportunity. Fortunately my vacation destiny was scenic, safe, and walker-friendly. I was surprised when I checked my pedometer and found that my sightseeing ventures produced 12,000 to 15,000 steps per day easily and at a leisurely pace. Walking has given me a better understanding of my environment, the people, and the culture that surrounds me than I would have experienced otherwise. Walking has also led me to discover many lovely and interesting sites in my community that I had never visited before.

How have you altered your diet?

I now eat breakfast regularly soon after rising rather than delaying it until later in the morning. Usually multigrain bread with cottage cheese or a bowl of old fashioned oatmeal with almond milk will suffice for breakfast on weekdays. On weekends, I may treat myself to a more traditional American breakfast but I then cut back on carbohydrates in the evening. I have increased my daily consumption of vegetables and reduced the portion size for other protein sources. Fish has become a staple in my diet and red meat a periodic treat. I regularly include foods rich in omega-3 acids. I drink more than 8 glasses of water per day and I dilute fruit juices to reduce insulin spikes. I have restocked my pantry and refrigerator with complex carbohydrates and products with low sugar content. I pay attention to sodium content and the fat content as well. These food choices have helped me to maintain a high level of energy throughout the day.

I am far less subject to blood sugar and mood swings than in the past and I seldom have to struggle with cravings. I confess that I'm not a Superman and a doughnut or a fistful of potato chips has the potential to initiate a feeding frenzy but the fact that I recognize this enables me to do a better job of controlling the situation.

Has additional exercise made you hungrier?

Actually the opposite has happened. I now eat controlled portions at regular times each day and am less subject to cravings and binge eating than before.

What has been the biggest challenge you have faced?

During the month of July, a member of our agency challenged other participants in the Virgin Health Miles program to discover who could walk the most steps in a month. During that month I averaged walking 23 miles per day. I won the challenge by walking 724 miles and my teammates also earned the highest team average for the month. I am ordinarily not a competitive person, but the public nature of the challenge and the prodding, teasing, and support of colleagues and friends kept me motivated. Although I would not want to exercise at that level every month, the challenge built my confidence that I can manage my health and weight. It also helped me better to appreciate the need for balance in one's life and patience with one's goals. I have returned to a daily schedule of 12,000-15,000 steps per weekday with a few more on weekends. That is quite manageable, continues improvements in body tone, and leaves me more time for other forms of rest and relaxation.

Another challenge has been politely dealing with friends and family who offer high sugar, high fat desserts as a token of their love. As they have seen the dramatic change in my appearance, they have become much more understanding of my willingness to taste rather than to indulge and several of them have altered their own lifestyle because they have seen my results.

Have you any tips or tricks for successful participation?

The Virgin Health Miles pedometer tracks and graphs steps taken, miles walked, calories burned and provides options to log activities other than walking. The website also includes an on-line library of very informative articles and videos that can be accessed on demand. Virgin Health Miles offers cash rewards, contests, gift cards, etc. However, once one begins to see the physical progress one can make with the program, the cash rewards become incidental to the health benefit.

I bought a Polar Heart Monitor which enables me to program walks up into 20, 40, 50 minute or longer segments of differing intensity. This has freed me from constantly watching the pedometer. The complimentary interface between the Virgin Health Miles and the Polar Fitness Training programs reinforces one's health goals.

A mini MP3 player allows me to set my rhythm and to maintain a challenging pace. Some of my friends tease me because I often select Latin or European Club music but I think it is great to have fun, lose weight, and learn a language at the same time.

I have added light strength training for a half hour 3 times per week (sometimes while I watch the evening news). Doing this has produced better toned lean upper body muscle and has speeded up the fat burning process. The Polar Health Monitor tracks the exercises, weights, and the repetitions I do.

I bought a set of bathroom scales for \$34 that measures weight, percentage fat, BMI, bone density, and hydration. A regular weigh in helps me note and catch slippage before it becomes a trend.

I also enjoy a free on-line calorie calculator that enables me to compare my caloric goal, consumption, and expenditure during the day. The program also tracks fat, sodium, carbohydrate, and sugar consumption. Since it is web-based and thus portable, the program enables me to adjust what I eat during the day based upon personal goals.

What human supports have you found helpful?

I am a person who likes to perform tasks alone. However, I found that the support group I have developed through walking really helps me to achieve my goals. I have met and made new friends both at work and in my neighborhood through walking and we encourage and support each other's improvements. I also joined the Belly Fat Cure classes and community to reduce stubborn belly fat that I was not able to eliminate through exercise alone.

How do you feel about your health challenge experience?

Exercise and healthy food choices have become a way of life for me rather than a program or task to be completed. The key to this healthy lifestyle can be through low-impact, moderate exercise, which is doable, inexpensive, and sustainable. I have seen that a combination of walking, strength training, portion control, and other improved dietary choices has made a difference for me and it can for others. Healthy living really isn't so hard if one is persistent and if one recognizes that occasionally lapses are an opportunity for correction, rather than a statement of failure. It is really a powerful motivator to look in the mirror and recognize how much better I both look and feel than I did a few months ago. It is also highly motivational to go shopping for clothes once again that truly fit and flatters rather than using clothing for camouflage. I'm glad I accepted the challenge.

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